

**The Tantara
'Massacre' Affair**

By Benny Morris

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The Tantura 'Massacre'

Historian Benny Morris has published an updated version of his landmark 1988 book on the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem. The new material he has uncovered, he says, indicates that Israeli soldiers were involved in more massacres of Arabs and other war crimes in the 1948 War of Independence than previously believed. In the article below, Morris details his research regarding one alleged massacre site, at what is today Kibbutz Nahsholim, in May 1948. In all, Morris says he has found evidence of about two dozen cases of massacre and numerous other acts of arbitrary killing, and about 12 cases of rape.

However, in a recent interview with the *Ha'aretz* daily, Morris argued that the total of fewer than 800 Arabs killed in war crimes was 'peanuts' in comparison to atrocities committed by other people, even in recent decades, in similar civil wars: 'When you take into account that there was a bloody civil war here and that we lost an entire 1 percent of our population, you find that we behaved well.' Morris also claimed that David Ben-Gurion covered up for those involved in the massacres and added that Ben-Gurion was 'a transferist,' someone who recognized that it was 'necessary' to uproot 700,000 Palestinians from the incipient sovereign Israel — because 'without the uprooting of the Palestinians, a Jewish state would not have arisen here.' Indeed, Morris argued that Ben-Gurion erred in not forcibly removing all the Arabs from the West Bank, Gaza and Israel itself, and that should Israel again find itself under existential threat, such expulsion 'will be justified.'

Despite espousing such sentiments, Morris, who was jailed for refusing army service in the territories, insists he always has regarded himself as left-wing. But he says that those who have claimed to find proof of this in his historical writings have failed to appreciate his objectivity and detachment. For many, though, Morris's scholarship — as exemplified in this article on the events at Tantura — may henceforth be perceived in an entirely new context.

Benny Morris

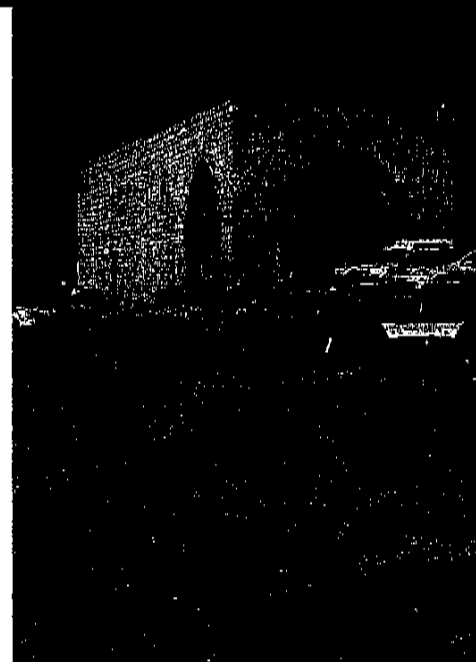
BETWEEN KIBBUTZ NAHSHOLIM and Moshav Dor, on the Mediterranean coast some 30 kilometers south of Haifa, a dirt parking lot serves visitors to the adjacent beach. Beneath its off-white, dusty surface, by some palm trees, lies an unmarked mass grave, where troops of the nascent Israeli Army in May 1948 buried the dead of Tantura.

The grave, says Teddy Katz, who took me there, contains the remains of as many as 200-250 Arab villagers. A small minority, he says, died in the fighting, when the troops of the Alexandroni Brigade conquered the village on May 23, a week after the State of Israel was declared and the Arab armies invaded Palestine; most were massacred after the battle.

This is also what Katz, a 59-year-old peace activist — he was speaking to me just

after distributing food in West Bank Arab villages — argued in an MA thesis submitted to Haifa University in 1998.

Alexandroni veterans passionately insist there was no massacre and that the grave holds only the remains of 70-75 villagers who died during the battle. The veterans sued Katz, a member of Kibbutz Magal, for libel, charging — and proving — that he had falsified evidence. During the trial — "in a moment of weakness," as Katz now puts it — he recanted and apologized. The court adopted his recantation as its verdict. Haifa University, which had given him an A+ for the thesis, suspended his degree and invited him to revise and resubmit it. He complied — but repeated the massacre allegation. Five specially appointed examiners failed the revised thesis by a margin of 3:2. In a supreme gesture of appeasement and ambiguity, the university



then awarded Katz a "second-class" degree, which effectively bars his path to PhD candidacy in Israel. On the legal track, Katz recanted his recantation and appealed the lower court's verdict to the Supreme Court — but it turned him down.

Katz and some of his supporters charged that the university and even the courts were politically motivated, intent on suppressing dissident historiographic voices and upholding Israel's image. University authorities, off the record, say similar things about Katz's motives, pointing out that he received \$8,000 from the PLO to cover his legal fees and that his most vocal supporter is the anti-Zionist revisionist Haifa University historian Ilan Pappé, who has strongly supported the boycott of Israel's universities by western academia during the past three years.

The affair raises the stark issue of whether there was a massacre at Tantura and if so, was it exceptional or, as some have alleged, one of many perpetrated by Jewish forces, including the Haganah/Israel Defense Forces, during 1948? It also raises some important academic questions: What is the value of oral testimony in establishing historical facts? How do the motives of historians affect their reconstruction of the past?

To tackle the first issue, a proposal has

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subject "by chance." He intended to write about the Arab exodus from Haifa but his supervisor, Druse historian Kais Firro, suggested that he focus on a cluster of nearby villages. Born and raised in Haifa, he was a Sea Scout in his early teens and he knew the Tantura beach. "We used to land our boats there and play," he says. "I had no idea that I would uncover a massacre, and I had no political motive in pursuing the subject."

He scoured the archives and conducted over 130 interviews with refugees and soldiers, taping many but not all. He unearthed no document from 1948 that even mentioned a "massacre" in Tantura. But the witnesses were something else. "I first spoke to villagers in the Wadi Ara area [about 20 kilometers east of Tantura], and

Haifa road, and a maritime entry point for arms from Lebanon.

Katz asserted "on the basis of more than 20 interviews," that for hours after the battle ended, the troops conducted "a lethal hunt after adult males, in order to kill them, wherever they were found, in the houses, in the courtyards and in the streets." Later, he wrote, the killing continued after prisoners were concentrated in the village cemetery. "No more than 10 or 20 of the men of the village fell in the battle, but by the end of that day there were no fewer than 200 to 250 dead adult males, in circumstances in which the villagers were without arms and completely defenseless," Katz wrote.

Katz quotes Alexandroni veteran Micha Vitkon describing how his company commander, Nahman Kaplansky (Karni), interrogated prisoners to find out where weapons were hidden, and then shot them with his pistol, "one after another." He quotes Abd al-Hafiz Muhsein (Abu Nabil), a Tantura refugee, aged 7 at the time, who spoke of seeing "the Jews take six or seven young men or maybe more, and shooting them in sight of everyone, without cause, and this is something I can never forget. Maybe before then they had been combatants."

Some Jewish witnesses, according to Katz, recalled a different order of killing. A number of Alexandroni soldiers of C Company had been killed or wounded in an incident in which Arabs opened fire after surrendering. In response, C Company's troops, according to Yosef Graf, "went through the village and slaughtered whoever they saw... at least 140 or 150 persons were killed."

Arab witness Rizik Ishmawi (Abu Sa'id), who was 13 in 1948, recalled walking about the village accompanied by an Israeli soldier looking for bread and seeing a group of 10-12 Israeli soldiers line up 25 Arab men against a wall and shoot them, as well as one woman.

Katz quotes Alexandroni engineers officer Shlomo Ambar as saying: "The picture etched in my memory is of the adult males at the cemetery. There I saw many men being killed... I left the place when I saw they were killing and killing and killing. That's why I don't know how many exactly were killed there." Faiz Ahmad Tanji (Abu Khalid), is quoted as recalling: "Afterwards, they took seven to 10 men and brought them near the mosque, shot them and returned and took another group. Thus, perhaps, about 90... men [were killed]..."

Katz also cites witnesses who said Jewish troops raped one or two women and robbed villagers of jewelry and money.

Late on May 23, several hundred adult

ECHOES OF A DISPUTED PAST:
The beachfront, and surviving Tantura structure, at Moshav Dor today; (below) the parking lot where the truth may lie hidden



ESTEBAN ALTERMAN

I noticed that whenever I said 'Tantura' they made a face. I asked why. And they said 'A big massacre.' Then I interviewed Tantura refugees, and I heard story after story." Most Alexandroni veterans denied the allegations of massacre; a few hinted at dark deeds; others refused to talk.

In March 1998 Katz submitted the 211-page thesis, "The Exodus of Arabs from Villages at the Foot of Southern Mount Carmel in 1948." Pappé, a Middle East historian, acted as Katz's unofficial supervisor, and is warmly thanked in the acknowledgments.

The bulk of the paper is devoted to Tantura, and its conquest by Alexandroni's 33rd Battalion. Village elders, under pressure from militants, had refused to surrender. Tantura was seen by the Haganah command as a threat to the main Tel Aviv-

been made to dig up the grave to determine how many villagers died and how. Katz and Tantura refugees living in Israel as well as Alexandroni veterans — according to their lawyer — support exhumation. But residents of Nahsholim and Dor are opposed; it would inevitably be a media circus and would underline the fact that they live on confiscated Tantura lands. (Nahsholim was founded four weeks after Tantura was conquered). Anyway, some witnesses say bodies were also buried elsewhere, and pathologists may not be able to determine whether the persons were killed in battle or murdered.

TANTURA IN SOME WAYS EPITOMIZES moral issues at the core of the Zionist experience in general and 1948 in particular. The village was conquered a week after the state was declared. Dozens (if not hundreds) of villagers, including many non-combatants, were killed and the remaining population, mostly women and children, were expelled. (Most of them ended up in West Bank refugee camps.) And the village was razed and the site almost instantly settled by Jews.

Teddy Katz says Tantura became his

males were packed off to POW camps; the remaining inhabitants, a thousand women and children, were trucked to nearby Fureidis, which had surrendered to the Haganah two weeks earlier. In mid-June, according to IDF documents, almost all the refugees from Tantura were bused out of Fureidis, under Red Cross supervision, to Tul Karm, in the Iraqi-held area of the West Bank, where many of them, and their descendants, still live in the Nur Shams refugee camp.

Katz firmly placed the conquest of Tantura and the expulsion of its inhabitants within the context of the Haganah's Plan D, whose purpose was to clear inland areas, especially along main arteries, and the border areas, about to be assailed by the Arab armies, of militia forces and hostile or potentially hostile villagers that harbored them. (Palestinian and pro-Palestinian historians, such as Walid Khalidi and Ilan Pappé, view Plan D, in my view wrongly, as the Jewish "master plan" of expulsion.) Katz does not specifically link the alleged massacre to Plan D — but attributes it to a thirst for revenge among soldiers whose relatives and comrades had been killed and mutilated by Arab militiamen.

In September 1998 Katz's supervisor, Firro, and two examiners — Yair Hirschfeld (who was involved in the secret Israeli-PLO talks that resulted in the 1993 Oslo agreement), and Israeli Arab historian Muhammad Yazbek — gave Katz 97 percent. In June 2000, the university awarded Katz a first class MA (with a 93 average), qualifying him to continue for a PhD.

On January 21, 2000, journalist Amir Gilat published a magazine piece in the Ma'ariv daily based on Katz's thesis and interviews he himself conducted with Tantura refugees and Alexandroni veterans. The refugees all maintained there had been a succession of atrocities and massacres; the veterans, and residents of Zikhron Ya'akov all denied it, but threw out some troubling hints. The article left readers with the sense there had been a massacre or, at least, that the Alexandroni veterans were hiding something. The veterans protested to Ma'ariv, and Gilat wrote a follow-up, in which the ex-soldiers again uniformly denied a massacre, but they were not mollified. For most, 1948 had been a golden moment, the point at which their lives intersected heroically, triumphantly, with history; their deeds in that war are the stories they tell their grandchildren. Now in their 70s and 80s, they weren't going to let anyone tarnish that memory.

"My soul knew no peace," wrote Amatzia Amrami, now 81, in his deposition to the district court. A platoon commander, he was wounded twice at Tantura. "I called

other veterans and said we must do something." The veterans retained Amrami's son-in-law, Giora Erdinast, 46, a Peace Now activist and a lawyer. His mother, Rachel Liebman, was a medic in Alexandroni's 32nd Battalion. "I asked her about the massacre story," says Erdinast. "She said: 'It never happened. I would have known.'"

In April 2000, the Alexandroni Veterans sued Katz for libel in the Tel Aviv District Court, arguing that Katz's charges "were deliberate lies published under the cloak of scientific research." The plaintiffs described themselves as "behaving toward their enemies according to the severest ethical standards during those difficult days."

Meanwhile at Haifa University, a group of professors began lobbying for annulment of Katz's MA, arguing that he had deliberately distorted testimony to prove his conclusion, itself politically driven under Pappé's tutelage. The university appointed a committee of four to examine Katz's use of evidence and to compare the tapes of his interviews with quotations in the thesis.

The committee found a series of distortions and inventions. Erdinast found more. For example, in his thesis, Katz quotes Ali Abd-al Rahman al-Arja'a (Abu Fahmi) as saying: "While this was happening, soldiers with Bren guns walked on both sides and occasionally fired, killing and wounding [captured] adult males." Abu Fahmi also said: "They gathered all the inhabitants of the village in the square, lined them up facing walls and murdered them in cold blood. I was witness to this crime. Some 95 persons were murdered; I wrote down the names of the dead."

None of this, I can confirm, appears in Katz's tape of his interview with Abu Fahmi: To the contrary, Katz repeatedly presses Abu Fahmi: "Clearly, people were shot after they surrendered" — to which Abu Fahmi can be heard replying: "We did not see them killing after we raised our hands."

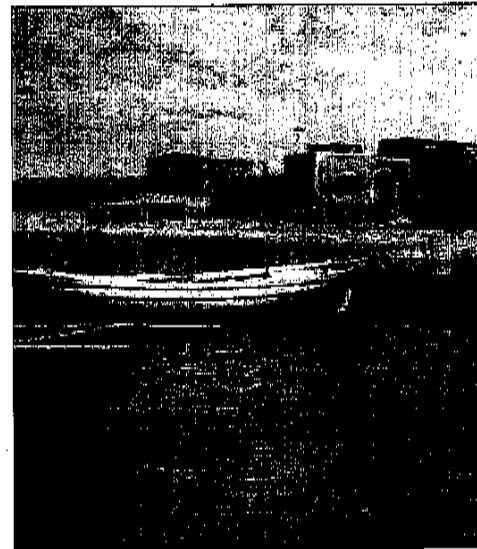
Katz quoted Shlomo Ambar as saying: "Even the Germans didn't kill unarmed and defenseless prisoners. After all, those who were their prisoners returned home alive. Herc in Tantura, Arabs were murdered." But the words, "Herc in Tantura, Arabs were murdered," aren't on the tape of the interview, I can confirm. Katz responds that several of his interviewees said things after his batteries ran out.

Under Erdinast's cross-examination, Katz broke down and signed a letter of apology stating: "I did not mean to say that there had been a massacre in Tantura and today, as well, I say there was no massacre at Tantura. I believe the Alexandroni veterans who flatly denied that a massacre had taken place." But within days Katz

withdrew his recantation and he refused to publish a letter of apology in the press, as he had promised.

The university's suspension of Katz's degree and offer to let him revise the thesis did not satisfy the outraged anti-Katz lobby, which demanded annulment of the degree, plus measures against Pappé.

With Firro still his supervisor, Katz re-submitted his thesis, now 568 pages long, in September 2002. He corrected the misquotations and distortions and reinforced the text with an appendix of lengthy verbatim



BEFORE THE WAR: Tantura as pictured in the mid-1930s. The village was conquered a week after the State of Israel was established; (inset) Teddy Katz

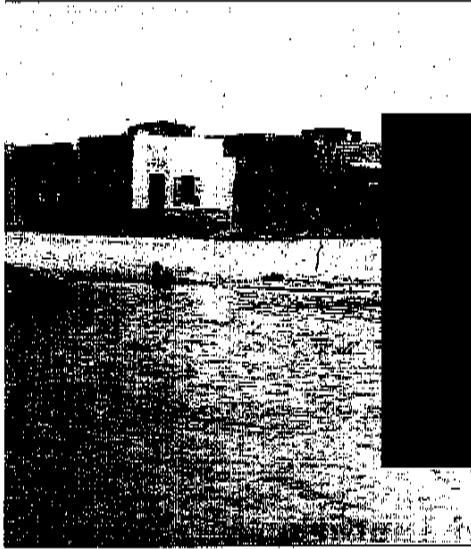
transcriptions from his interviews. He remained adamant that Alexandroni troops had massacred dozens, perhaps hundreds, of Tantura villagers after the battle.

The university appointed five examiners who, by a 3:2 margin, failed the thesis. The two who passed it gave Katz 83 and 85. One of those who failed it awarded the thesis a 74, and may not have known that this was a failing mark. The other two who failed it, giving it 40 and 50, were Dr. Avraham Sela (Hebrew University) and Dr. Arnon Golan (Haifa University). Three years ago, together with Hebrew U. professor Alon Kadish, those two scholars authored "The Conquest of Lydda, July 1948," published by the Israel Defense Ministry Press. The slim volume, apologetic in focus and intent, argued that the Israeli Army had carried out only a "partial expulsion" of the populations of the Arab towns of Lydda and Ramlah and dismissed

the charge that the troops had massacred Lydda townspeople, some of them inside a mosque, on July 12, 1948.

In fact, according to IDF records from 1948, in the IDF archive, what was ordered and carried out was a full-scale expulsion; and Yiftah Brigade troops killed some 250 townspeople. Oral testimony of Yiftah veterans, deposited in the Yigal Allon Archive in Kibbutz Ginossar, posits that the troops fired one or more bazooka rounds into the mosque compound, where dozens of Arab POWs were being held. The authors even

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COURTESY TEDDY KATZ

failed to mention the expulsion order signed by Lt. Col. "Yitzhak R." (Rabin), the operations officer, which ordered the Yiftah Brigade to expel "the inhabitants of Lydda."

TEDDY KATZ MAY HAVE WRITTEN, and rewritten, a bad thesis; he may have recanted and then recanted his recantation. But does this prove that there wasn't a massacre in Tantura? Not really. I listened to some of Katz's taped interviews with Alexandroni veterans, interviewed some myself, and interviewed one of Katz's more solid Arab witnesses — and came away with a deep sense of unease.

I interviewed Rizik Ishmawi in his Fureidis flat. He runs a successful earth-moving equipment company and says that Jewish firms have canceled contracts with him since he told Katz and then Gilat his Tantura massacre story. His son, unhappy with the consequences of his media statements, shouted at him while I was there, but Ishmawi nevertheless recounted his tale to me.

The Alexandroni veterans I interviewed — Shlomo Ambar, Amatzia Amrami, Moshe Gershoni, Ya'akov Erez — cleave to

the brigade's official history, "The Alexandroni Brigade in the War of Independence" (IDF Press, 1964), which devoted 11 pages to Tantura, with no hint of massacre or atrocities; it even omits mention of the expulsion, though the veterans today sheepishly acknowledge the forced exodus. It ends with an account of the troops taking a swim before leaving the site.

The Katz-Tantura affair teaches us that one cannot base a reconstruction of events on the testimony of witnesses decades afterward. Faulty memory, political interests, flaws in transmission or translation — all impair credibility. In a case like Tantura, played out against the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Palestinian demands for a "return," Arabs will "recall" Israeli monstrosity and Israelis their own blamelessness. Historians must rely on contemporary documentary evidence.

So if there was a massacre at Tantura, why is there no trace of it in the available records, Israeli, U.N., British, American, or Arab?

A simple answer is that mass murderers rarely leave written records of

their crimes, and the murdered can't. However, in my long study of the Israeli-Arab conflict and, specifically, the 1948 war, my experience has been that wherever there was smoke, there was fire: Almost invariably, a document surfaces corroborating oral traditions of massacre. Take Deir Yassin: For decades, the Palestinians fostered an oral tradition of massacre while veterans of the two Israeli groups involved in fighting in the Arab village on the outskirts of Jerusalem on April 9, 1948, maintained their blamelessness. But over the decades, British and, more recently, Haganah records have surfaced corroborating the core of this oral tradition — though not its exaggerations. The same applies to more than a dozen massacres (including at Ilabun, Majd al Kurum, Arab al Mawasi, Jish and Safsaf) in May and October 1948 in which, Israeli and U.N. documents attest, several hundred Palestinians were killed, all told.

In the Tantura case, so far, no such evidence has surfaced. Millions of army documents from 1948 have not yet been screened and declassified, and perhaps an Israeli or Arab diary entry will yet surface. But so far, there is nothing.

Or almost nothing. There is one 1948 document that gives off the rancid smell of

atrocities. But it is not as explicit as a historian would like. An Alexandroni man, Tulik Makovsky, died in battle on June 1, 1948. But a week before, he was in Tantura and jotted down in his diary: "On the hill to the left were snipers who succeeded in hitting too many people. Two squads were sent to catch them. I was in one of them. After advancing according to the rule book, we succeeded in catching six snipers. We discovered their arms after firing to frighten them. What I learned here was that our boys know the craft of murder quite well... especially boys whose relatives the Arabs had murdered... or those harmed by Hitler [they are the same fascists]. They took their private revenge, and avenged our comrades who had died at their hands, against the snipers. I felt that in doing this they were unleashing all the anger and letting out all the bitterness that had accumulated."

Israeli 1948 documentation declassified over the past decade indicates that Alexandroni's commanders didn't want Tantura to surrender, as this might have entailed its continued existence behind the Israeli lines (like Fureidis, further inland). The May 22, 1948 operational order for the conquest of the village, by the commander of the 33rd Battalion, made no mention of what should become of the inhabitants.

The initial post-battle report, apparently from May 23, by "Avraham," the brigade intelligence officer, reported that the enemy had suffered "about 20 dead" and that 300 adult males and 200 women and children had been taken prisoner. A follow-up report, by A Company's deputy commander, written on May 26, said nothing about the fate of civilians, though it mentioned the need to put an end to the looting by troops and civilians from nearby Jewish settlements. No one mentioned a massacre or atrocities.

But the conquest of Tantura did give rise to a series of enigmatic documents. None of the three versions of a report on the Tantura operation by Ya'akov Epstein — Yakub al-Mukhtar (Yakub the Headman), as the Tantura Arabs called him — who served as a liaison between Zikhron Ya'akov and the surrounding Arab villages, mentions a massacre. And nowhere does he say that his arrival on the morning of May 23 put an end to a massacre (as several of Katz's Arab witnesses alleged). He does say that he found dead Arabs scattered about "the approaches [to the village], in the streets, in the alleyways, in the village houses and around it"; that Alexandroni commanders asked him to look over the adult males, who were sitting in two long rows, and identify any non-locals; that he organized the gathering and burial of the

dead in mass graves. And that he was "fearful that this night there would be an unpleasant [event] in the village. In my heart I thought that there could be another Deir Yassin." He advised commanders that it would be best that the remaining villagers, mostly women and children, be trucked to Fureidis. This expulsion, which he described, duly followed.

During 1948, IDF intelligence monitored Arab radio broadcasts and twice or three times a week issued reports summarizing them. The report for June 21-22 — issued after most of the Tantura civilians had all been expelled from Fureidis to Tul Karm in the West Bank — states: "An Arab woman who fled from Tantura relates that the Jews rape Arab women and are destroying the place." A variant of this report speaks of a woman who related that Jews had "raped women in addition to acts of robbery, theft and arson."

If there had been a massacre, is it probable that this woman would have failed to mention that the Jews had slaughtered

the chief of staff, when the state's very existence hung in the balance, take an interest in Arabs' cows?

An alternative explanation might be that the messages referred to damage to buildings. The site had been earmarked for immediate Jewish settlement so authorities may have wished the buildings be left intact. But why would the Minority Affairs Ministry take an interest in the destruction of buildings in Tantura? In April-June whole villages were being leveled by Jewish units as they conquered district after district. And besides, the brief of the Ministry was inhabited Arab villages, not Jewish settlement sites.

Which leaves a last, disturbing possibility: That the Alexandroni troops indeed committed a massacre or a series of atrocities, that the Ministry heard about it — and that they thought the matter worthy of investigation. But given the high-level sensitivity to atrocities, all preferred to use a euphemism, *habalah*, instead of the explicit *tevah* (massacre). But for lack of further

interviews. We have Makovsky's diary and Micha Vitkon's statements, both to Katz and to Gilat, that there was execution of prisoners by B Company's commander, Karni, and that there had been "killing."

ABOUT TWO WEEKS AFTER THE fall of Tantura, Haim Gvati, a young left-wing settlement official (three decades later, Israel's agriculture minister), visited Tantura and wrote his wife, Batyah: "There is talk of settling the site. It's a beautiful spot. It has all the features necessary for a successful seaside economy coupled with a good piece of fertile land... Along the coast there is a magnificent beach with a great future, once developed. Indeed, everything is great. But there is one drawback — it is not ours. The land is Arab-owned and though the village has emptied of its inhabitants we cannot yet regard the place as [suitable] for settlement by us. But it appears that, nonetheless, we shall set up a young kibbutz there to safeguard the village and shore."

Why would the chief of staff take an interest in Arabs' cows?

dozens, if not hundreds, of villagers, and that Arab radio stations would not have announced this? Of course, it is possible that the woman spoke of a massacre and the radio stations broadcast this — but the Israeli monitors excluded it from their report.

And there is a last enigmatic piece of documentary evidence. A week after the battle of Tantura, the IDF chief of staff, Yaacov Dori, no less, cabled the commanding officer of the Alexandroni Brigade, Dan Even: "I have been told by the Department of Arab Affairs [he probably meant the newly created Minority Affairs Ministry] that our soldiers who entered Tantura carried out many acts of sabotage after the conquest and needlessly. Please inform me to what extent the things I have been told are true and what have you done to prevent such acts in the future." The Alexandroni Brigade commander responded the following day: "A certain amount of damage was caused by our people immediately after they entered the place. This was due mainly to 'the enthusiasm of victory' and explicit orders were issued forbidding a repetition of such incidents."

What was this exchange about? Two 33rd Battalion veterans I interviewed explained that the messages, in using the word "sabotage" (*habalah*, in Hebrew) referred, in code, to the plunder by Zikhron Ya'akov farmers of abandoned Arab livestock. To me this makes little sense: Would

evidence, this must remain speculation.

So what happened in Tantura? As things stand, there is no way to reach a clear determination: It is the word of several aging Arab refugees against that of the solid phalanx of aging Alexandroni veterans. The refugees' tale of a rolling massacre echoes and may, indeed, derive from, the tale of Tantura told in the memoir by Moslem preacher and politician Nimr al-Khatib from Haifa, "The Catastrophe of Palestine." The account is based on the purported testimony of a single eyewitness. Khatib's book, originally published in Beirut in 1950 or 1951, carries the first published description of a large-scale, systematic massacre at Tantura.

The fact that none of the refugees went on record in 1948 itself, or anytime before the 90s, stating that a massacre had taken place is surely worthy of attention. Even Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi's encyclopedic survey of the lost villages, "All That Remains," [Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992], in a sense the embodiment of the Palestinian collective memory of 1948, makes no mention of a massacre at Tantura.

But atrocities — war crimes, in modern parlance — appear to have occurred. Many of the Tantura dead, even if they only numbered 70-75 as Alexandroni veterans would have it, were unarmed civilians or disarmed militiamen. A number of Alexandroni veterans said as much in undisputed

His face twisting into a smile, Rizik Ishmawi complains that when he and his children want to stroll on Tantura's beach or dip in its sea, they, like every other visitor, must pay a 20-shekel (\$4.50) entry fee.

But at the southern end of the beach, near a cluster of modern, igloo-shaped bungalows, stands one of three surviving Tantura structures: most of a large two-story stone house which used to belong to Ahmad al-Haj Yihya, Tantura's headman. Young Arab men sit about in its portico, drinking beer and smoking. They come from Fureidis, they tell me; some are grandchildren of refugees from Tantura.

The portico overlooks the shore, where half a dozen boats with outboard motors are moored. The youngsters, many of whose grandfathers were fishermen, use them for fishing. A few years ago, after moving into the house and establishing their presence as a *fait accompli*, they reached an agreement with the local authorities to use the Yihya house as a storeroom for their equipment and this section of beach for their boats. They spend afternoons and most weekends there.

In a sense, for this particular group of refugees, the Return has already begun. ●

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